

**General Assembly**

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Agenda item 121

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001**Review and assessment of the asbestos problem at the United Nations: management of asbestos-containing materials at the United Nations Headquarters buildings****Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions**

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the asbestos problem at the United Nations Headquarters buildings. The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/249 of 22 December 1999, paragraph 187, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it during its fifty-fourth session a detailed and comprehensive report addressing the asbestos problem. During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General who provided additional information.

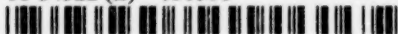
2. The Committee notes from section III of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/779) that the document covers the United Nations Headquarters buildings, the UNDC-I and UNDC-II buildings, the former UNITAR building and leased spaces in other buildings in New York. The Committee notes that the report does not cover buildings at Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi or the locations of the regional commissions since that was not requested in the above-mentioned resolution.

3. In connection with the buildings at the United Nations Headquarters complex, the Committee notes from paragraph 11 of the report that asbestos-

containing materials were extensively used as the buildings were constructed in the early 1950s, when the use of asbestos was widespread. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that since measures to manage asbestos started at United Nations Headquarters, 30 per cent of the asbestos has been removed from the buildings. The Committee was also informed that with regard to the UNITAR building, 70 per cent of the asbestos has been removed and the remaining 30 per cent remain encapsulated, mainly on the ground floor.

4. The Committee notes from paragraphs 17 and 31 of the report of the Secretary-General that it is not possible to remove all the asbestos-containing materials from the United Nations Headquarters buildings without vacating and isolating multiple floors and that this would be undertaken in the context of implementing the capital master plan for extensive renovation of the United Nations Headquarters buildings which is to be presented to the legislative bodies in 2000, as and when funding for such a plan has been approved.

5. With regard to current measures for the management of asbestos, the Committee notes from section VI of the report of the Secretary-General that these include continued encapsulation of the existing



asbestos, whereby it poses no health risk to staff, delegates or visitors; semi-annual testing of all air supply and return sources for presence of any asbestos fibres; and the removal of asbestos-containing materials only where the maintenance, alterations, improvement, construction or other activity necessitates its removal. The Committee was informed that all handling of asbestos had followed standard procedures and unacceptable levels had not entered the air stream.

6. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that between 14 and 15 complaints concerning asbestos are received every year. On receiving a complaint from staff, a licensed independent contractor is sent to test the area for the presence of any asbestos fibres and the results are made available to staff through the Medical Services Division. Investigation of past complaints have not led to a positive finding of asbestos fibres in the air stream.

7. As indicated in paragraph 28 of the report of the Secretary-General, for the 2000-2001 biennium the amount of \$1 million has been budgeted for the management of asbestos at United Nations Headquarters. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that since this programme started, \$1 million has been budgeted every biennium and expenditures have ranged from \$250,000 to \$500,000 per year.

8. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General and that information be provided on buildings at Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and the locations of the regional commissions.